

21 March 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED

ON PAGE 31

# Weinberger Practices the Dark Arts of Misrepresentation

In the fall of 1924 the first Labor government ever to hold power in Britain was fighting for its life. Sapped by charges that it was soft on communism, it sustained a fatal blow when the Daily Mail printed, in the dying days of the election campaign, a letter from Grigoriy Zinoviev, president of the Communist International. The letter urged the British comrades to step up their seditious activity, the better to hasten the glorious day of revolution. The ensuing

## Viewpoint

by Alexander Cockburn

Red Scare finished off Labor, and a Conservative government led by Stanley Baldwin took power.

Historians use the case of the Zinoviev Letter as a classic example of forgery used to good political effect, for forgery was indeed what the letter turned out to be, concocted by the British Foreign Office, whose senior officials had little enthusiasm for the Anglo-Soviet Treaty that the Labor-Liberal coalition was nervously attempting to negotiate. The ingredients were simple: unscrupulous intelligence analysts at the Foreign Office, and a credulous, even complicit press, led by the Daily Mail. Such has been the kitchen recipe for fomenting a Red Scare from that day to this.

Amid the larger Red Scare—about the supposed imminence of a Soviet attack—which is a permanent fixture of the landscape, a smaller Red Scare is now in full swing, aimed at persuading the public in general and Congress in particular that Nicaragua stands poised to annex the rest of Central America to the Soviet empire and that the only way to counter this threat to U.S. security is to release, for openers, \$14 million to the "contras."

No weapon has been spurned by the Reagan administration in this campaign, and it comes as no surprise to find that just like those officials in the British Foreign Office in 1924, Caspar Weinberger and George Shultz have been practicing the dark arts of misrepresentation of documents. Nor does it come as a shock that a substantial portion of the mass media has been a willing accomplice to this disinformation campaign.

It is hard to determine when the allure of epistolary Zinovievism grew too great for Mr. Weinberger to resist. There seems to have been nothing in his childhood or

even at the Office of Management and Budget to suggest a natural affinity to the vice. It was probably the excitement of superintending that Pentagon classic of Red Scaremongering, "Soviet Military Power," that overwhelmed the defense secretary and unleashed his creative powers. In the 1982 edition of that booklet, Mr. Weinberger presented an exciting drawing of a Soviet "antiaircraft laser," which turned out to have no existence except in the mind of the man from whom Mr. Weinberger had commissioned the art work, a Colonel Loup of the Defense Intelligence Agency, who refers to himself as the Loup Design Bureau.

Once entered upon, a life of crime is not easily abandoned and by now even the most sanguine caseworker must despair of Mr. Weinberger's rehabilitation. In February 1984 the secretary released a draft "White Paper" on Nicaragua, as proxy in the aims of the Soviet Union. The preface appearing under his name strove to emphasize "the extent of Soviet interest in exploiting the economic, political and social problems of Central America and the Caribbean. . . ." Mr. Weinberger then quoted from a document seized during the U.S. intervention in Grenada. This was a memorandum of a meeting on April 15, 1983, between Maurice Bishop, then Grenadian prime minister, and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. According to Mr. Weinberger the document stated that Mr. Gromyko "warned the Grenadians to move carefully in their revolutionary expansionism so as not to signal their plans to the 'imperialists.'"

This is the way villains in James Bond movies talk but not, as it turns out, the way Mr. Gromyko addressed the Grenadians on April 15, 1983. I have the memo, released by the State Department, before me now. At no point did he warn them "to move carefully in their revolutionary expansionism" and to conceal their plans. To the contrary, as the author of the memo recalled it, he urged the Grenadians "to exercise great care and flexibility so as not to provoke the imperialist forces to smash the progressive forces."

In other words, Mr. Gromyko was doing the exact opposite of what Mr. Weinberger alleged. He was urging restraint and moderation upon them. Nowhere, at any point in the memorandum, are the words "revolutionary expansionism" used. These form Mr. Weinberger's personal contribution to history and, more to the point, to the media that hastened to publicize the secretary's view of what Mr. Gromyko had said. The British Foreign office of 1924 could not have wished it done better.

This Weinberger distortion is a good example of what has become common practice throughout the administration. No doubt anxious not to be outbid by his cabinet colleague, Secretary of State Shultz sponsored some creative insertions into a 1979 Sandinista telex sent to the OAS prior to Somoza's fall, promising elections in the event the Sandinistas gained power. What starts with simple tampering with words ends up with massive distortions of fact, reproduced in the press, particularly on these pages, with the utmost enthusiasm.

A casual reader of these editorial pages might easily assume that the Nicaraguans have not had elections, indulge in regular orgies of mass murder and are mustering forces to launch attacks on both Costa Rica and Honduras. In an article on the opposite page appearing on March 11, John F. Guilmartin Jr., formerly of the USAF, drew a horrifying picture of the menace of the Mi-24 Hind helicopters imported by Nicaragua, which, said Mr. Guilmartin, with the Soviet tanks already in the country and "with the delivery of high-performance MiGs for top cover and deep interdiction strikes, the classic Soviet-style blitzkrieg package will be complete."

So stirring was Mr. Guilmartin's urgent prose that it took a considerable effort of will to remember that Nicaragua has not got MiGs, has just two Mi-24 Hinds and would have considerable difficulty in launching a blitzkrieg with its 60-odd venerable T-55 tanks against Tegucigalpa, given the mountains, forests and rivers in their path.

These fantasies continue to pour forth. Over at the Central Intelligence Agency, William Casey raises the number of Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua seemingly in tune with the quality of his lunch: 2,000 one day, 3,000 the next. One week they are all "disguised as teachers"; the next they have, according to Mr. Casey, shaved off their "Castro-style beards" and—white-chinned to the last man—integrated themselves into the Nicaraguan armed forces.

As recently as this Monday, President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua said there were 786 Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua. Since he has offered the U.S. on-site verification of Nicaragua's military forces, maybe a party should leave Capitol Hill for Nicaragua and start looking for these white-chins.

It's a comedy but also a tragedy.

Little lies, endlessly repeated, become big lies. Big lies endlessly repeated end up in the destruction of reason and the deaths of thousands of innocents in Nicaragua.

Mr. Cockburn is a columnist for The Nation magazine.